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ABSTRACT

The role of the principal as an educational leader for the 1990s is described in this keynote address. The first part discusses the roles and responsibilities of principals and supervisors as administrators, managers, and leaders. The second part examines educational issues of the 1990s, which include: (1) the importance of education to all sectors of society; (2) a commitment to higher levels of learning; (3) the challenge of educating all children; (4) the uses of realigned curriculum, technology-based instruction, and multifaceted assessment; (5) the design, development, and implementation of diverse learning environments; and (6) the shift to lifelong learning. (Contains 5 references.) (LMI)

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PRINCIPALS AND SUPERVISORS

BRIDGE TO LEARNING

Keynote Speech at PSA Fall Convention

(New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association)

Harrah's, Atlantic City

November 9, 1990

by

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Good morning! It is a pleasure to be here to address you at this conference of the New Jersey principals and supervisors. The theme of your conference, Bridge to the 90s, is most appropriate as we think about your work.

Principals and supervisors have long been responsible for the future of our children, our schools, our communities, and our country. Today in our knowledge based economy where we are so interdependent with other countries, you are responsible for the future of our world. That future has arrived over and over again. Each year as a group leaves your primary, elementary, middle, junior high, or senior high school you move them into the future. As a group of children leave one grade level for another you move them into their future.

If you've been a principal for four or five years, you've seen children who began learning in your school who have now moved to another level. It is awesome, isn't it, to think how you have been responsible for the learning of those students. You have moved them from the present to their future.

They have learned because of your leadership. You have had a vision. You have designed and developed an action plan and timeline from the vision. You have used your skill to get teachers to work together and with you. You have used your talent to communicate with parents. You have used your expertise in building a team of teachers, support staff, parents, and community members.

The team you brought together has determined the goals for your school. They've worked with you to establish an environment which has students learning at the center.

As students have been successful you have been recognized for your ability to lead. You have been accorded prestige within the school, the district, and the community. And a great deal of autonomy within your school. You have

been able to use your creativity in setting the school agenda. You have been skillful in conflict resolution. And if you couldn't resolve the conflict you managed it so learning could take place. You understand both large group and small group dynamics. You know how to build coalitions, how to negotiate, and how to mediate. You know how to work with all kinds of people so the school has a positive image.

You know how to work with the superintendent and district office staff so you can bring in new resources. You listen to the school staff as they talk about their needs for the resources of time, space, people, and/or money. You work with them and community members to determine how best to acquire the resources.

You understand that with autonomy and discretion comes accountability. And you are willing to be accountable because you have a clear vision and mutually agreed upon goals. These goals deal with student learning. You know that when your staff members work as a team and are productive that students will produce and learn.

You are an interactive rather than a linear thinker. You scan the environment and are aware of the economic, sociological, and political factors which are present. You know how to anticipate changes and deal with new issues. You can deal with the ambiguity of change. And you can help others deal with it. You know the common attributes of strategies for change and can help other recognize them.

As an entrepreneur you are a risktaker. You also encourage the teachers and staff members to take risks. You provide the support they need so they can use their creativity in developing diverse settings for learning; or in helping you develop a diverse school. You welcome differences and find strength in them as well as in your likenesses. You work to maintain the

stability of your staff as you develop a history together. Children benefit through the shared history.

Your regular meetings and systematic planning allows staff to intervene when changes need to be made. Or to be reinforced for their success and productivity when everything is going well. You know when to form advisory councils or communities of staff or parents or interested others (Pellicer, Leonard O.; Anderson, Loren W.; Keefe, James W.; Kelley, Edgar A.; and McCleary, Lloyd E. 1988).

You are an administrator, a manager, and a leader!

So what will happen in the 90s? How can you continue to be the bridge to learning?

First, education, today enjoys a high level of importance to all sectors of society. On election day 1990 when researchers conducted exit interviews at the polling places, they found voters often ranked education higher among issues than the environment or the economy. Legislators, governors, and other politicians are involved in the design and development of education policy which not too long ago was left to the local boards and administrators. The President of the United States even uses education as an adjective before his title of president.

Business men and women have a new interest in education. They seek partnerships with schools, provide scholarships to students, honor teachers for excellence (sometimes with large sums of money), write op ed pieces for the newspaper, author books telling us what changes are needed, and sometimes complain about the quality of learning of our students.

Postsecondary institutions set new standards for entrance or for exit, praise us for encouraging young people to continue their education and

sometimes complain about the amount of remediation they have to do with our graduates.

The media report on academic achievements as well as athletic prowess, write features on teachers who use innovative instructional strategies or new curriculum, and hold educators in high esteem. Remember when the only time there was a front page story was when there was a food fight in the cafeteria?

Second, the purpose of education will continue to be debated in the 90s. We have always believed that education was necessary for the growth and development of the individual. Thomas Jefferson told us many years ago that to have a democracy the masses must be educated; a second purpose of education is to develop citizenship. But in recent years we have heard far more discussion about a third purpose: education for economic growth. In fact the National Center for Education and the Economy recently published a report (National Center on Education and the Economy's Commission on the Skills of the American Work Force 1990) which says we have a choice between high skills or low wages in this country. Their challenge is to educate 90% of our students with the same high quality education that the top 10% presently receive. Is such a goal reachable? What changes would you have to make in your work? Are we willing to make the changes? We know we don't want to settle for low wages.

A third major issue in the 90s relates to the second issue of purpose of education. And that is, how do we educate ALL children? All children must learn; we can no longer afford to have throw-away children. When 25% of students graduated in 1925 or 50% graduated in 1950, there were jobs for them in an industrial society. But in a knowledge based economy there are no jobs for the uneducated. If people are not productively employed, they most often

depend on society for sustenance. Our challenge is to find new and creative ways to educate children who have enormous needs which educators have neither the resources nor skills to meet. We will have to learn how to work with other agencies, health, human services, jobs and training, and corrections, to name a few. Collaboration in use of resources, dollars, time, and talent will be necessary (Randall, Ruth E. 1989).

A fourth major issue which follows the second issue of higher levels of learning and the third of educating ALL children is dealing with the triad of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Curriculum must be realigned to increase cross-disciplinary, multi-task learning activities. There will be greater use of student controlled team activities. The community will be used as the focus of study. Students will participate in many problem solving exercises (Hutchins, Larry 1990).

Technology will be used to deliver instruction and manage instruction. Computer and telecommunications will be an integral part of the instructional strategy.

Assessment will include portfolios of work, observation of children solving complicated problems, and committees of assessors listening to children explain what they've learned. Outcomes of learning will be determined by teacher, principals, supervisors, parents, citizens, and perhaps students. Many people will be involved in decision making about curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Hutchins, Larry 1990).

A fifth major issue will be designing, developing, and implementing diverse learning environments. As parental choice of school expands there will be a demand for schools which are different. Parents will become sophisticated in understanding the growth and development of their children

and will want programs which aid their particular child. Principals and supervisors will want to provide information to parents about the merits of their school; they will want to counsel parents about how the programs in their school meet the needs of the child (Randall, Ruth E. 1990)

A sixth major issue will be to understand the shift to lifelong learning. Learning in early education programs will have to be integrated with kindergarten and primary learning; secondary schools will need to work more closely with postsecondary institutions as juniors and seniors have opportunity to take college level courses during their high school years. The curriculum must contain the learning how to learn skills as today's children become adults and have to adapt and learn new skills for different jobs and changes in their professions.

Summary

It is exciting to look ahead into the 90s as there are so many challenges. There is no doubt that your effectiveness in planning and your willingness to take risks in managing your school are needed. You will continue to be recognized as influential leaders!

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